

# Escalante River Watershed Partnership

## Full Partnership Meeting

October 20, 2020 | 10:30am – 1:00pm | Zoom meeting

### NOTES

**Participants** - see [here](#)

### Next Steps

- The next ERWP meeting will be in the spring of 2021
- Meet to discuss Cardno's support of ERWP fundraising activities. (**Sarah, Kristen, Ron**)

### Updates

All attendees were given the opportunity to share a brief update with the group on the work they have been doing since March. Below are the updates relevant to the ERWP.

- Utah Conservation Corps is operating at reduced capacity, but working with ERWP partners and others at Johnson Creek and other areas.
- The field spring surveys were delayed, but John has put together photos of common spring plant species as well as write-ups of spring types, which can be put on a tablet or smartphone.

### Committee Updates

ERWP 10-year celebration – *Linda Whitham (TNC)*

- Linda gave an overview of the last partnership meeting and celebration in Spring 2020; see [slides](#)
- To mark our 10-year anniversary and the success of the completion of the river restoration work, SDR guided the partnership through a Shared History activity. This helped new partners get a sense of the broader history of the partnership, and it produced a permanent record of the ERWP's history.
- Also hosted a celebration in partnership with the Walton Family Foundation. Peter Skidmore received two plaques from the ERWP. Dave Livermore from the Utah chapter of the Nature Conservancy presented the plaques. Noel Poe presented one of the plaques and Dave presented the other. Also notable was the guest appearance and speed from Billy Schott, Superintendent of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

Coordinating Committee – *Kristen Jespersen (REW)*

- Kristen reviewed the partnership's available funds and outstanding costs; see [slides](#)
- Working to ensure we have the capacity to keep the partnership functional.

- Eleven entities have contributed funds or in-kind match to the ERWP in 2020. This reflects that we have achieved a certain level of diversity of support as we move on from depending on the Walton Family Foundation.
- Funding needs for 2020:
  - Riparian Restoration Committee - \$50,000 for conservation corps crews
  - Springs Committee - has calculated their anticipated financial activities for 2021 at \$10,000; Kristen will add these to the funding needs.
  - Climate Change Committee - \$15,000 needed for 2021
  - Other Committee funding needs will be calculated.

#### Climate Change – Sarah Bauman (GSEP) and Dennis Bramble (Univ. of Utah)

- See [slides](#)
- This committee was formed last November in response to discussions in the partnership about focus areas that were needed. There has been good progress given the COVID restrictions.
- The purpose of the committee is to do research on the effects of climate change and support other ERWP committees in adapting to climate change. It is hoped that the research that emerges will impact the entire Monument.
- Subcommittees have been designated to accomplish work between meetings: Logistics, Ecology, and Climate.
- Currently focusing on reaching beyond the committee to support the partnership as a whole.
- Pilot project – Upper Sand Creek Research Natural Area to evaluate effects on Ponderosa Pine and the Escalante River Watershed. Did one site visit this year, and are planning a second visit in spring 2021.
- Looking for input from partners on what research could be done on the RNA; have been working with scientists and the Dixie NF.
  - Suggestion: conduct an aspect and elevation analysis to find a batch of high elevation north- and south-facing slopes, as well as low-elevation north- and south-facing slopes. Surveys of replicated, uniform-sized plots in each of those habitat would provide sideboards for what to expect in terms of climate change impacts on vegetation and ecosystem structure. Possibly also find a pinyon-juniper woodland site, but may be difficult to find
- Looking for potential funders of the Climate Change Committee initiatives.
- If interested in joining this committee, contact Kristen Jespersen.

#### Springs Committee - John Spence (NPS) and Larry Stevens (SSI)

- See [slides](#)
- Ryan Thomas, a Master's student, developed a GIS algorithm to identify springs from aerial imagery. The lower Escalante was used for this project, and 1,500 objects were identified that could be springs. They will work with the Grand Canyon Trust next year to do some ground truthing.
- Developed an app compatible with smartphones and tablets that citizens
- Working on a photo album of common spring vegetation species.

- Spring inventory on the Escalante National Monument – Inventorying high-priority springs (in areas that are not well inventoried). This is a three-year project that started in 2019. The density of springs on the monument seems to be less dense than the surrounding lands – is this because of technology or the actual absence of springs? 316 springs were added to the database.
- Diverse flora and fauna were found along with varying levels of water quality.
- Also considering the relational effects of the many components of spring environments.
- Determining which merit restoration-level attention based on which spring have anthropogenic risks and natural resource conditions.
- Held a workshop on October 3, 2020 with the ERWP.
- The data on this project is on Springs Online (springsdata.org and springstewardship.org) to anyone authorized.
- The site visited last spring has one of the highest levels of diversity – but the highest diversity Larry has seen is a spring at Cedar Breaks, which had 100 vegetation species in one wetland.

#### Upland Vegetation Management Committee - Terry DeLay (Dixie NF)

- See [slides](#)
- Ponderosa Pine communities are the main area of focus, especially given the effects and risks of fire.
- Implementing many projects in the Escalante River Watershed, including prescribed burns. Prescribed burning this spring was shut down because of COVID; it is now too dry to burn.
  - The recent fire in Boulder County, CO, blew up to ~9,000 acres instantaneously and is the biggest in county history. The fire up Poudre Canyon west of Fort Collins is >200,000 acres, largest in CO recorded history.
- Mitchell Springs – This was the last major treatment needed to treat fuels. It also protects CO River Cutthroat Trout. \$162,000 was earmarked for the Mitchell Springs project. However, the small diameter of the trees has a limited market for timber sales. Trees over 12 inches in diameter will be cut in a 350-acre area, then 8-12 inch trees will be cut, decked, and either left to the USFS to sell as firewood or take to sell. The project will start in November 2020.
- Hungry Creek Farm Bill – 300,000 acres centered around the water system for the town of Escalante to reduce fuels and protect from future fires. A fire that occurred on the west side of the Dixie NF affected 3 separate municipal watersheds. The timber sale was awarded to the mill out of Panguich. Not sure when they will start, but have developed a Proposed Action for the existing NEPA.
- Hungry Creek Landscape Assessment – After that is done, the Forest will start scoping the 100,000 acre project to treat ponderosa pine from North Creek to Pine Creek.
- Timber sales are the most efficient contracts because they pay the forest for the slash treatment, reforestation, and road recovery treatments.
- Dennis has started studying the South Hollow weather station. We are in a drought, and This year is the first time temperatures have exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit there.

The vapor pressure deficit was sufficiently low to research the level that has killed pinyon pine and juniper at lower elevations.

- Found some pinyon pine with fire scars, which will be a good research resource.
- Also approached by the UT Division of Wildlife Resources to accelerate vegetation treatments on the Boulder Mountain plateau (this is beyond the Escalante Watershed). This could be a good opportunity to compete for funding. Fashioning this after an effort on the Fishlake NF, which the Grand Canyon Trust participated in. Want to involve diverse partners to accomplish it.

#### Riparian Restoration Committee – Jonathan Paklaian (GSEP) & Emily Kasyon (SCC)

- See [slides](#)
- 2020 work includes Russian olive hand treatments across three land ownerships and implementing the updated vegetation monitoring protocols
- Need to get continued NPS support for crews as well as new trucks (this work is extremely hard on vehicles).
  - Suggestion of trailering a UTV to reduce impacts on trucks. This is much cheaper than paying for truck repairs from damage sustained in the remote outback of southern Utah.
- An additional person is also needed to organize and lead projects; Jonathan is working to get funding.

#### Native Fish & Wildlife - Erik Woodhouse (UDWR)

- See [slides](#)
- Off-channel springs seem to be the source of fathead minnow, which does not always show up in the mainstem.
- Funded through June 2021; will remove more non-native fish in the early summer.
- Will be packrafting through the lower section in Glen Canyon area; BLM can join if interested. They will be inventorying 25 Mile wash to Coyote Gulch, about 40 miles.
- The ERWP is hosting a packrafting trip in the spring; WRI is sponsoring raft rentals.

#### Stewardship & Community Engagement – Kristen Jespersen

- See [slides](#)
- This committee offsets needs for labor.
- Still in the development phase of matching project needs with interests of the community.
- GSEP is hiring a Volunteer Coordinator in Spring 2021; this person could help organize small, local events. This job will be posted on January 2021 and will be based in Escalante.

## **New Partner: Cardno**

Ron Rudolph gave a presentation on what Cardno as a company does and how they hope to help out the ERWP. Cardno will be joining the Partnership, and this was an opportunity to get

acquainted with the company and with Ron. Ron spent the last 10 years conserving lands in southern Utah. He has protected areas from extractive projects and connected conservation work with federal funding. He also has a close personal history with the area. His first professional job was with Friends of the Earth in the 1970s, and later became the Executive Director.

### Overview of Cardno – Ron Rudolph

- See [slides](#)
- The impetus for initiating Cardno's partnership with the ERWP started in Canyon de Chelly, where Ron's tour guide (who grew up living in the canyon) said that the biggest change she had seen was the amount of Russian olive.
- In the ecological restoration realm, Cardno can consult on ecological assessment, geomorphological studies, and other technical support. They have data and equipment that can be used (50cm resolution).
- Federal lands did not allow the use of drones until very recently, and using them would be of interest to Cardno. There are still restrictions on using drones that use Chinese components.
- Potential ways for Cardno to support the ERWP:
  - Doing a 100-sq km area proof of concept project using aerial imagery for restoration efforts such as monitoring grazing impacts on riparian and wetland habitats on USFS lands
  - Supporting the Spring Committee's work on spring inventory.
    - One challenge would be that satellites capture 50% of existing springs on low-angle terrain, and rarely capture hanging gardens.
  - Maintain an native plant nursery where they grow native plants for restoration. It is currently geared toward the Midwest region, but could potentially grow plants for the ERWP.
  - Supporting fundraising efforts (proposals, etc.)
    - **Next step – Schedule meeting on fundraising for the ERWP (specifically fundraising efforts) – Sarah, Kristen, and Ron.**

## **Meeting Evaluation**

Participants were asked for their feedback on the new virtual format of the meeting. Below are the summarized comments:

- Timing was about right, with some participants saying it could have been longer if there was a longer break, and one suggesting a two 2-hour sessions with a lunch break and another suggesting three hours with two breaks.
- More time in breakout sessions; consider having Committees meet in breakouts.
- More strict time limits on update presentations
- Consider more time to follow up on each committee's presentation.